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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001080

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVES EDUCATION LAW,
LEGISLATOR CALLS IT "BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR FIDEL CASTRO"

REF: A. CARACAS 1079
[1](#)B. CARACAS 1034
[1](#)C. CARACAS 985
[1](#)D. CARACAS 933

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Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DARNALL STEUART,
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The National Assembly approved the Education Law late August 13, amidst well-founded accusations of procedural irregularities, just eight days after the proposed text was made public on August 5. Opposition leaders, educators, and parents have declared that the text of the law is "more dangerous" than was anticipated, and enables the hiring and promoting of teachers based on ideology, introduces "Bolivarian Education," and dramatically diminishes the autonomy of universities. Demonstrations occurred over the past week, both for and against the proposed education legislation, and turned violent on August [1](#)13. This proposal has dominated press coverage and public attention, distracting Venezuelans from the July 31 passage of the controversial Law of Electoral Processes (ref C), about which post will report separately. Demonstrations against the Education Law are likely to continue as schools and universities re-open. End Summary.

A CONTROVERSIAL LAW RUSHED THROUGH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

[1](#)2. (C) In the past several weeks, President Chavez, Minister of Education Hector Navarro, Minister of Higher Education Luis Acuna and National Assembly (AN) members have called for a new Education Law. The AN leadership decided that the 2001 first discussion of the Education Law was still valid, so a new text was released directly into its second discussion on August 5. Even AN members of the pro-government Patria Para Todos political party said that procedurally the 2001 introduction of a different text could not be considered a first discussion. Nonetheless, president of the AN Cecilia Flores insisted the vote be held on August 13. Private school leaders, educators, and parents had been very wary of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (GBRV's) version of the law (ref D), and the text released on August 5 justified these concerns. The Catholic Church, a major player in both public and private schools, has also come out against the law. Demonstrations at the National Assembly on August 13 were violently disbursed and a pro-government group attacked journalists handing out flyers against the law's restrictions on the media (ref A). The AN approved the law just before midnight on August 13, after

several lawmakers walked out of the session in protest. AN member Aleydys Manaure described the law's passage as "a good birthday gift for Fidel Castro," who turned 83 on August 13.

"BOLIVARIAN EDUCATION" AND TEACHER HIRING

13. (C) The new law gives the GBRV sweeping control over both public and private educational institutions. The text calls for "Bolivarian Education," the ideological melange that President Chavez denominates as 21st Century Socialism, and facilitates the use of a "Bolivarian Curriculum," part of which has already been developed. The GBRV printed a Bolivarian Curriculum in 2007, and teachers were recently given related workbooks in preparation for the new school year, even before the law was passed by the AN. The law also authorizes the "Consejo Comunales," local bodies tied closely to the executive branch, to be part of the evaluation and supervision of schools.

14. (C) This law changes the process for hiring and promoting teachers. Many people concerned about Chavez's proposal for "Socialist Education" earlier felt assured that the changes would not be implementable. President of the Educators Federation of Venezuela, the largest teachers' union in the country, Orlando Alzuru, told PolOff May 21 that Venezuelan teachers would reject out of hand the insertion of ideology into schools. Their actions, however, may now be tempered by the provision of the new law that allows the GBRV to hire and promote teachers at will. President of the Fenatev teacher's union Pedro Morantes said publicly August 9 that with this law "in schools there will not be teachers, only political commissars." (Note: Given that general government employment goes almost exclusively to pro-Chavez applicants, teachers

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have reason to fear that their jobs will be in jeopardy under the provisions of this new law. End Note.) Dr. Leonardo Carvajal, a respected education expert, described the term "Bolivarian Education" to PolOff as "one long Alo' Presidente," referring to President Chavez's weekly television programs which frequently include anti-American rhetoric.

GBRV CONTROL OF UNIVERSITIES

15. (C) The new law also effectively ends much of the autonomy enjoyed by universities in Venezuela. Under the banner of "democratizing education," the law gives the Ministry of Higher Education control over admissions and registration policies, teacher hiring, and the selection process for administrators. Universities have been under GBRV pressure for some time (ref B) and this law appears to eliminate most of their constitutionally - mandated autonomy. University leaders have protested vigorously against this law, in public forums, in the press, and on the streets. (Note: The student movement has been a highly respected part of the opposition to Chavez's "Bolivarian revolution." This law could radically change the make-up of the student body at major universities. End Note.)

COMMENT

16. (C) This controversial law was rushed through the National Assembly during a month when many Venezuelans are on vacation. The new law proposes to change fundamentally the nature of education in Venezuela, both public and private. Public rejection of earlier GBRV education proposals successfully prevented these kinds of changes to the law governing the education system (ref D). Approval of this law confirms Chavez's surging determination to dominate virtually

all domestic issues. Nonetheless, implementation will be contentious, with protests likely to continue when schools and universities open again in September.

DUDDY